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homemakers' chat

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"HOME SEWING AIDS." Information from clothing specialists of U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

This fall you're probably sewing and remodeling clothes for the whole family. It takes time to sew a neat, professional-looking garment. But the clothing specialists of The U. S. Department of Agriculture have some good tips for you -- simple common-sense ideas for making better use of equipment, or using ordinary household articles to make sewing easier.

When you think of sewing, the first thing that comes to mind is "needle and thread." Well, needles are scarce, and getting scarcer, but good care will help them last. The black paper they come in prevents rust, but if needles should become rusty, run them through fine steel wool (if you have it) or through a piece of beeswax, or an emery bag....only don't leave needles in an emery bag--they'll get rusty. To keep needles within easy reach, fasten a woolen cloth to the top bar of your sewing machine. Don't mix needles and pins--keep the pins separate, in a small flat box with a lid.

Now for a few tips about thread: Basting thread is less expensive than sewing thread. Or use soft darning thread, or embroidery cotton, for basting... they don't pull out as easily as sewing thread. When you're sewing on buttons, wax the thread on a piece of beeswax or paraffin to make it smooth and strong. Another button-sewing trick while we're on the subject: lay a darning needle over the top of the button, and bring each stitch over the needle to make a thread shank. Then the pull comes on the thread, instead of on the material.

You can use a number of common household articles to make your sewing jobs

easier. For example, tweezers, to pluck out threads caught in machine stitching....old razor blades--the single-edged kind--to rip machine stitching in short order....a transparent ruler for marking hems, or measuring between button-holes....a yardstick for skirt lengths, and for placing patterns accurately on the material. Borrow a triangle from the menfolks' workshop to square off crooked edges or corners on patterns--these need to be absolutely straight for a well-cut garment. If you're working on material that's bulky, and hard to pin, hold the pattern in place with paperweights, or smooth metal nuts, or glass furniture coasters.

Tissue paper has many uses in sewing. Baste sheer, pull-y material right onto tissue paper. The paper holds the material in shape until it's stitched... then pull away the paper. Wrap delicate materials in tissue when you put them away....lay them on tissue to keep them clean while you're working on them.

Use old cardboard to make a notched gauge for measuring small hems and seam allowances. Cardboard is handy too for marking scalloped edges....just draw your pattern on the cardboard with an ink bottle or the bottom of a glass, then cut it out.

An old strip of oilcloth laid wrong side up on the floor or on a table makes a good cutting surface....materials won't slide on it.

Another household article for your sewing outfit: cornstarch, in a little cloth bag. Dust your palms with it when you're working on light-colored delicate material--the cornstarch absorbs perspiration from the hands, and your material stays clean.

For convenient hand sewing, make yourself a basting brick. Pad and cover a building brick, place it on your sewing table, and pin the fabric to it....your fabric will be firm while you work on it.



If your sewing scissors double as general household shears, you aren't doing right by them. Sewing shears are meant to cut cloth. Never cut paper, or wet cloth--it dulls the blades. Once a week put a drop of oil on the screw of the scissors. If your scissors develop a catch when you're cutting, borrow an old-time trick from the tailors: open the scissors wide and then draw them down over your hair in the back--turn them over and do the same with the other side. This oils the blades just the least bit--just enough to make them work smoothly.

And now a couple of ideas about cleaning up after a session of sewing. An old sheet spread on the floor around your sewing table and machine will catch threads and ravelings, and save clean-up time. And a small magnet is excellent for retrieving spilled or scattered pins.

Perhaps these home-made sewing helps will suggest other, similar ideas to you. Sewing is an important job for the homemaker this year, and by using ideas such as these, you can sew more efficiently--turn out better-looking clothes with less time and effort.

